Rapporteur's Summary
Taking Stock: Nuclear Disarmament and U.S. Disarmament Diplomacy
A roundtable convened by CGSR in Washington DC, May 24, 2017
Summary prepared by Brad Roberts

U.S. disarmament diplomacy is at a crossroads. Eight years after President Obama's Prague speech, a new administration confronts a changed security environment with a fundamentally different political orientation. To help inform the development of policy, the Center for Global Security Research convened a one-day roundtable in Washington DC on May 24, 2017. Discussion was unclassified and not-for-attribution. A bipartisan group of approximately 20 experts, including individuals affiliated with four presidential administrations (including the current one), participated.

Two key questions motivated the discussion:

- Looking ahead 30-50 years, what would be required to make Global Zero plausible?
- Looking ahead 8-10 years, what goals should guide U.S. disarmament diplomacy?

The agenda was divided into four main topics, as below. As background reading for the workshop, participants were provided copies of a recent essay by Dr. Lewis Dunn, entitled *Redefining the U.S. Agenda for Nuclear Disarmament: Analysis and Reflections,* which was published by CGSR in October 2016 as the inaugural Livermore Paper on Global Security.

Disarmament Diplomacy: Lessons Learned from Recent U.S. Efforts

The Obama administration's disarmament diplomacy focused heavily on creating the conditions that would allow the United States to take further steps to reduce the number and role of nuclear weapons in partnership with others. Toward that end, in 2009 and 2010 it set out a short set of conditions it hoped to create over two terms. Its experience clearly demonstrates that those conditions do not now exist. Russia is not willing to pursue deeper reductions in its strategic nuclear forces or any restraints on its non-strategic forces. China is not willing to accept a dialogue on strategic stability or commit to new forms of nuclear transparency or restraint. North Korea rejected the "open hand." And allies in both Europe and Northeast Asia continue to depend on the U.S. nuclear deterrent and support a modernized force (including the U.S. capability to forward-deploy nuclear weapons with non-strategic delivery systems). The United States is left now with a choice between not pursuing further reductions at this time and pursuing reductions unilaterally (and the latter is a choice that looks un-sound in the current security environment).

The administration's experience also vividly illustrates the value U.S. allies and the U.S. Congress attach to the "balanced approach" recommended in 2009 by the Strategic Posture Commission and embraced by the Obama administration. This approach encompasses both political and economic means to reduce and perhaps ultimately eliminate nuclear threats with

military means to deter nuclear attack so long as nuclear weapons remain. A one-sided approach is not politically sustainable.

This experience raises important questions about setting expectations. Arguably, the Obama administration set them too high, whereas the George W. Bush administration set them too low. The Strategic Posture Commission said that the safe elimination of nuclear weapons would require a fundamental transformation of the international political system. There's a legitimate debate to be had on threading the needle between unrealistic expectations arising from President Obama's Prague speech and having no expectation of progress.

How should the new administration think about the task of setting disarmament expectations? The group took various views of this question. Some argued in favor of aiming high by reaffirming the long-term commitment to the elimination of nuclear weapons, on the argument that doing so pays important dividends for U.S. security and diplomacy. Others argued in favor of explicitly aiming lower, on the argument that diplomacy must reflect a realistic view of what is possible. Still others argued that the new administration should talk explicitly and fairly about the efforts of all three administrations since the end of the Cold War to reduce nuclear risks and dangers and about the lessons of their experiences. One participant evoked Mark Twain, arguing that "when in doubt, tell the truth." That truth includes the fact that the necessary conditions to achieve that goal do not exist at this time and are not proximate. This implies that the United States should instead focus its actions and diplomacy on reducing nuclear risks and nuclear dangers.

What to do about the Ban movement emerged as a major focus of discussion. Again, divergent views were evident. Some asserted that the Ban can safely be ignored, on the argument that its moment of maximum influence has now peaked and it will soon be shown to be impotent in influencing the Nuclear Weapon States (NWS). Others argued that the long-term impact of a new prohibition norm – even without adherence by the NWS – could prove greater than anticipated. In that regard, a strong case was also made that the political impact of the Ban will be felt disproportionately among the democracies—and especially those allies under the U.S. nuclear umbrella. Thus, many argued, Ban supporters should be engaged in a manner respectful of their underlying anxieties about the risks of reliance on nuclear deterrence. At the same time, it is important to address directly the potential damage a treaty could do to the non-proliferation regime. For both reasons, according to this second perspective, it important to maintain open lines of communication.

A strong case was made that the main U.S. messages on disarmament are no longer credible. The "step by step" approach, an important contributor to the decision to extend the NPT indefinitely in 1995, has stalled. Over time, the resulting growing frustration among non-Nuclear Weapon States (NNWS) could undermine the NPT, which remains essential to U.S. non-proliferation posture. However, it was argued that failure of the United States to reaffirm its commitment to Article VI of the NPT would embolden the states pushing the ban, undercut allies trying to manage strong domestic disarmament constituencies, and hand Russia a golden opportunity to claim U.S. abdication of NPT leadership.

A key point of discussion is whether the long-term goal of elimination is intrinsic or instrumental. That is, would elimination actually improve U.S. and global security? Or would abandonment of the goal be unhelpful for various reasons, even if the goal itself is impractical? The instrumental value was widely accepted within this group—continued U.S. commitment to this goal helps to reinforce non-proliferation and assurance, whereas abandonment of it could accelerate the collapse of the non-proliferation regime and arms control. The case for an intrinsic value was made primarily on the basis of risks avoided and the longer-term uncertainties of nuclear deterrence.

The Moral Discourse about Nuclear Deterrence

The moral case against nuclear deterrence reflects the view that nuclear weapons are little more than instruments of mass murder. The case follows from an assessment that their employment in war would necessarily violate the principles of international law—of discrimination and proportionality. Thus their "use" in peace to prevent war must also be morally flawed. And because it would be immoral to use them, goes the argument, it must be immoral to plan for their use. Shifting currents of thinking within the Catholic Church were discussed in this context, emphasizing the evolution away from the 1982 Pastoral Letter on the bomb to a view today emphasizing the supposedly inherent immorality of such weapons.

The moral case for nuclear deterrence has not been set out widely or in a politically compelling manner. A partial case has been made on the argument that the advent of nuclear weapons in world politics coincided with the end of major war among major powers. Whether there is causation or merely correlation evident here cannot be known. Conspicuously, the moral case for nuclear weapons is not politically important for the non-democratic possessors of nuclear weapons, who are not publicly accountable in the same way as Western leaders to public values.

Little discourse between these two views exists. But the argument against the morality of nuclear weapons has been given major impetus by the Ban movement. So what should the United States do? The following recommendations were made:

- Stop ignoring the issue. Engage with key stakeholders and opinion elites.
- Set out forthrightly the conditions that would be necessary to enable the elimination of nuclear weapons and fairly characterize the prospects for achieving them.
- Take the international legal dimension seriously. Anticipate a return of the nuclear issue to the International Court of Justice and a revisiting of the 1996 findings.
- Discuss these issues at a high political level with U.S. allies, especially those under the nuclear umbrella, in a manner that is respectful of the political frictions generated by life under the nuclear shadow.
- Address the concerns about nuclear risk and put forward risk reduction initiatives, thereby responding to a major driver of the Ban movement.

Discussion focused on how to live ethically with nuclear weapons so long as they remain. The case was made that the United States (and as many of the other Nuclear Weapon States as possible) should focus on preserving the taboo against nuclear employment and on ensuring the safety and security of nuclear arsenals. A case was also made for shifting the focus of discussion from morality to responsibility and more directly setting out an agenda of responsible nuclear stewardship. In this context, it was argued, the United States has a special responsibility as a leader of the global nuclear order to lead in articulating and demonstrating such nuclear stewardship. A key question was whether existing U.S. nuclear employment guidance is sufficiently aligned with the commitment to employ nuclear weapons only in manners consistent with the requirements of proportionality and discrimination (a question that cannot be answered in an unclassified discussion).

The Global Zero Aspiration: What Would Make it Plausible?

If the elimination of nuclear weapons is today implausible, what might make it seem plausible in the future? Three alternative pathways were discussed. The first would be major changes in the international political system (the "fundamental transformation" as described by the Strategic Posture Commission), including an end to the kinds of rivalries among major powers that might lead to major war, a resolution of the problems seen as requiring nuclear weapons, successful implementation of the non-proliferation regime, and effective responses to nuclear cheating. The second would be a major shock of some kind—presumably the massively destructive employment of nuclear weapons, leading to a "never again" perspective that sweeps aside existing reservations about disarmament. The third would be a recognition that the risks of continued possession of nuclear weapons outweigh the risks of their elimination. This is the view taken by many Ban supporters, who judge that the conditions already exist but are not recognized by states reluctant to lose the aura of nuclear deterrence. In the view of most in the workshop, the first pathway is not in fact plausible. The second is possible but not desirable. The third is not safe.

If it were somehow possible to persuade the nuclear-armed states to relinquish their nuclear weapons, how then would security be safeguarded? Such a world would be very fragile. Absent political transformation in the international political system of some fundamental kind, it would likely be prone to arms races at the conventional level, as states exploit their different power potentials for relative gain. Any large-scale war would likely generate new nuclear demands and a competitive pursuit of nuclear (re-)armament. In such a world, prevention of war and of nuclear (re-)armament would require much stronger international institutions than it has so far been possible to create. Those institutions would have to enjoy privileges to intrude and inspect that would offend the sense of sovereignty of many states. They would also have to enjoy the privileges to act militarily to suppress conflict, in ways that would also likely offend the sense of sovereignty. They would require the support of all of the major powers and most of the less-than-major ones.

These arguments helped to generate a discussion of what stability would require in such a world. Concerns would remain about first strike stability. There would be new concerns about

reconstitution stability (could one side gain a decisive advantage and also then exploit it for an enduring gain?), infrastructure stability (same questions but over a longer time frame), and proliferation stability (in terms of whether effective responses to proliferation could be expected).

These arguments led many to the conclusion that the kinds of international political changes necessary to ensure security in a world without nuclear weapons are beyond our reach and thus a world without nuclear weapons would not be secure and would involve even high risks of major war and new forms of nuclear competition than the world we live in today. However taking steps towards imagining a world with reduced salience of nuclear weapons and the possibility of "strategic elimination" could be undertaken as a 30-50 year goal.

Implications for U.S. Disarmament Diplomacy

In light of these various assessments, what can U.S. disarmament diplomacy reasonably accomplish over the next 8-10 years? Discussion distinguished near-term goals versus longer-term ones.

In the near term, key U.S. goals should be to:

- Signal continuity of U.S. commitment to a leading role in defining and protecting the international nuclear order, including the non-proliferation regime.
  Emphasize the importance of nuclear risk reduction and put forward an agenda for risk reduction – a view shared across the spectrum of participants.
  Set out an agenda for nuclear arms control and nuclear disarmament that aligns with lessons learned from recent experience and a realistic assessment of the existing security environment. Preserve existing agreements and initiatives, particularly those that provide a venue for dialogue between NWS and NNWS.
- Reaffirm the U.S. commitment to the NPT, including explicitly Article VI, as a first step to leading an international political discussion of what goals are realisitic and what goals are not in light of practical experience.
- Insulate the non-proliferation regime from the effects of the Ban movement, by selectively engaging the Ban process and Ban supporters and others among the non-Nuclear Weapon States, while setting out an alternative long-term vision that is neither the ban nor the step-by-step approach.
- Devise a communication plan to explicitly and fairly present the efforts of the last three U.S. administrations (since the end of the Cold War) to reduce nuclear risks and dangers and about the lessons of their experiences.
- Sustain the moratorium on nuclear testing and support for the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organization.
- Continue the work to strengthen the safety and security of nuclear weapons and materials. The summits may be over but the work continues.

Both in the nearer- term and over the longer term, the primary U.S. goals should be to (1) preserve the taboo against nuclear use and (2) ensure the needed restraint by the nuclear-armed states in their policies and postures.

A key recommendation was to focus on renewing cooperation between the United States and Russia on nuclear security and stability. Toward that end, it was suggested that a joint bi-national commission of distinguished former civilian and military officials could be useful. It could be asked a simple question to start: does it matter if the era of bi-national nuclear arms control ends? If the answer is yes, then the harder question is: so how can the two best cooperate to preserve and adapt arms control to new purposes in a different era?

A key question for every new presidential administration is how to utilize the "bully pulpit" to advance U.S. diplomatic objectives. Here the group discussed the special questions generated by a president whose pulpit includes social media and whose message has sometimes seemed at odds with the requirements—as so far understood—of nuclear diplomacy and stability. As the administration moves from its 100-day plan to what may become a 4-year plan, it needs to develop a communication strategy that successfully aligns its main messages with the policies it adopts to advance U.S. and allies' security in a world of greater nuclear dangers.

Prepared by LLNL under Contract DE-AC52-07NA27344. LLNL-TR-734508